472 97 G75 opy 1

Military Order

Loyal Legion

of the

United States

COMMANDERY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

E COMPANY OF THE PARTY OF THE P

WAR PAPER 41.

A Pharge at Port Jonelson, Pebruary
15, 1862.





# Military Order of the boyal begion

OF THE

## United States.

×

COMMANDERY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

\*

WAR PAPERS.

41

A Charge at Fort Donelson, February 15, 1862.

PREPARED BY COMPANION

First Lieutenant

JOHN G. GREENAWALT,

Late U. S. V.,

AND

READ AT THE STATED MEETING OF APRIL 2, 1902.

L 47

100 mg = 21

9

### 3 Charge at Fort Douglson, February 15, 1862.

### PREFACE.

The success of the Union forces at Fort Donelson, Tennessee, February 12–16, 1862, was momentous. A full history or detailed narrative of the battle, aside from the official reports, has not been published. The reports appearing in the published Official Records of the War of the Rebellion are quite voluminous, especially so on the Confederate side; the latter showing much contention, crimination and re-crimination between the civil officers and the military leaders of the Confederacy in command, as to the blame for, and cause of, the downfall of that stronghold.

A later chapter in this controversy is found in a life of the noted Confederate cavalry leader, General N. B. Forrest, written by Dr. John A. Wyeth (a Confederate soldier captured at Donelson), published in 1899. The chapter on Donelson is mainly in explanation of the circumstances under which General (then Colonel) Forrest got away with his cavalry in company with Generals Floyd and Pillow, after the memorable midnight conference of February 15, at which Floyd turned the command over to Pillow, who in turn relinquished it to General S. B. Buckner, after which they stole away in the night, leaving the task of surrender at daylight to General Buckner.

Dr. Wyeth, in his book, comments on the loss of Donelson to the Confederate cause as follows:

"The struggle at Donelson was the first decisive battle of the Civil War. The Confederate historian will yet decide that in shaping events which, step by step, wrought the downfall of the Southern Coalition, Fort Donelson stands preeminent. It was a blow which staggered the Confederacy, and from which it is safe to say it never wholly recovered."

My paper relates to a single incident in the engagement, embodying some personal observations and experiences as a private in the ranks of the Second Iowa Infantry.

#### A CHARGE AT DONELSON.

My story this evening relates to the surrender of Fort Donelson, Tenn., February 16, 1862, but more particularly to the part taken in the engagement by the Second Iowa Infantry in a charge made resulting in the occupation of the outer entrenchments of the enemy on their extreme right the afternoon of the 15th.

General Grant, in a congratulatory order dated February 17, 1862, said: "The victory achieved at Fort Donelson is not only great in breaking down rebellion, but has secured the greatest number of prisoners of war ever taken in one field on this continent. Fort Donelson will hereafter be marked in capitals on the maps of our united country."

Undoubtedly as the year 1862 dawned there was a feeling of uncertainty, if not to say despondency, among the loyal people of the North over the military situation, and of anxiety as to the future. The severity of the winter and effects of exposure of our troops in the field, illy prepared as they were for such hardships and exposures—as well as the rather negative results achieved during the preceding summer and fall—caused these sentiments to exist; and the people at home, as well as the forces at the front, were eagerly expectant as to the spring campaigns contemplated, as the opening months of the new year progressed.

A brief review of the military situation in Kentucky and Tennessee at this period will be of interest in connection with my story. On the Confederate side the possession of these States was early deemed of vital importance. This fact was clearly evidenced by their early occupation and the preparations made to hold them. Starting at Columbus, Ky., oppo-

site Belmont, Mo., on the Mississippi river, they had erected and were constantly constructing a line of offensive and defensive works extending southeastward into the mountains of East Tennessee. The most important of these were at Columbus, Mill Spring, Bowling Green, Ky., and Forts Henry and Donelson—guarding, respectively, the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers, and Nashville, in Tennessee.

On the Union side General Buell, with headquarters at Louisville, had his four divisions, under Generals Mitchell, McCook, Thomas and Crittenden, thrown forward in Kentucky, confronting the lines of the Confederates. From Cairo, Ill., General Grant was deploying his forces, McClernand's towards Columbus, Paine in the direction menacing New Madrid, Mo., while Smith moved from Paducah, Ky. These feints perplexed the Confederates, and concealed the real intentions of the Union commanders.

It has been aptly stated by historians that it was the intention of the Confederate leaders to make Kentucky a battleground in the West as Virginia was already destined to be in the East. A glance at the map will disclose what a gateway Kentucky and Tennessee was to the southern and eastern States of the Confederacy. Forming in themselves a rich agricultural region, in front of them they had resources in view comprising not only great and well stocked farming communities but rich cities as well. So, as stated in this brief general way, we find the Union and Confederate forces confronting in the two States named, and hastily passing, we may note the opening engagement of the new year in the attack upon General Humphrey Marshall, and the complete rout of his forces January 10, 1862, at Prestonburg, Kv., by the troops under Colonel James A. Garfield, which success earned the latter his general's stars. On January 19, General George

H. Thomas obtained a signal victory and one of the most important achievements of the war, at that period, at Mill Spring, Ky.

About this time or a little later, under the accepted axiom of war to strike the enemy's center, General Grant, whose district had been enlarged to include among other territory Kentucky, west of the Cumberland river, commenced concentrating his forces chiefly at Cairo, Ill., and Paducah, Ky., and prepared to move on Fort Henry on the Tennessee. On February 6th this work succumbed to the assaults of the "Iron-clads," or what was then known as the "Western Gun Boat Flotilla," under the command of Commodore Andrew Hull Foote. The land forces did not arrive in time to cooperate, owing to the nearly impassable roads and the early reduction of the batteries of the fort by the iron-clads. On February 12th, following, General Grant moved on Donelson, twelve miles distant across the country on the Cumberland river.

The Compte de Paris, in his memoirs of the Rebellion, says: "The importance of Donelson after the fall of Fort Henry was equally appreciated by both the Federal and Confederate forces, as that fort alone was able to stop Federal forces on the Cumberland, and protect the capital of Tennessee."

Situated on the west bank of the Cumberland river this fort was the most important stronghold of the Confederates in the West. It was intended to check advances upon Nashville by way of that river. The country in the vicinity is much broken by hills and gullies and several small streams. The fort proper was built upon the highest hill on the river, near Dover, the country town of Stewart county, Tennessee. General Albert S. Johnston stated in his report explaining the surrender: "I determined to fight for Nashville at Donelson, and have the

best part of my army there to do it." It is conceded that the defenders of the fort numbered upwards of 18,000 troops.

Again, I quote the Compte de Paris:

"The attack of General Grant upon an entrenched enemy was a bold movement. His army hastily recruited was illy supplied; many regiments were without necessary equipments for a winter campaign even in that latitude. In this condition the Union forces were about to attack an enemy equal in numbers, posted inside of works carefully constructed, and controlling the river which secured his communications and bases of supplies. But General Grant knew what he could expect from the hardy men of the West who composed his army."

General McClernand's division began the assault on February 13th, on our right, and gained positions of importance with a considerable loss. During the night of the 13th, General Lew Wallace arrived from Fort Henry with his division, and was assigned to the center of the line of investment. The fighting on the right again assumed the proportions of a battle, and the gunboats, under Flag Officer Foote, commenced the attack on the rebel water batteries, but were repulsed after a brief engagement.

The forces of General Grant which he brought from Fort Henry and the Tennessee were augmented on the 14th of February by troops sent up the Cumberland, and this date brought the regiment, to which I belonged, upon the scene.

The Second Iowa Infantry, commanded by Colonel James M. Tuttle, had been mustered in in May, 1861. We had first guarded the Hannibal and St. Joe Railroad, being stationed at St. Joseph, Mo. In July, 1861, we went to Birds Point, opposite Cairo, Illinois; from thence to Kentucky, and by fall the regiment had become greatly decimated by disease. Ordered

to St. Louis late in the fall, we were first quartered at Benton Barracks, and later placed on duty guarding Confederate prisoners confined in the McDowell Medical College Building, in the city of St. Louis. On February 10th we were ordered to reinforce General Grant, and embarked on the steamer McGill, reaching Fort Donelson on the morning of the 14th by the Mississippi, Ohio, and Cumberland rivers. Disembarking, we marched back to the line of investment where the regiment was assigned to the Fourth Brigade, commanded by Colonel J. G. Lauman, of the Seventh Iowa, thus comprising the Second, Seventh, and Fourteenth Iowa, the Twenty-fifth Indiana, and a part of Birge's Western Sharp-shooters. This brigade was attached to the second division commanded by General Charles F. Smith, which occupied the extreme left of our lines.

During the day of the 14th the weather turned cold, and in the evening rain followed by sleet and snow set in, and we spent a night of great suffering and hardship to the whole army. Hidden from the enemy by a narrow strip of woods only, our camp and lines within musket-fire of the rebel entrenchments, and without tents or blankets (which had been left on the boat), with here and there a small sheltered fire behind some favorable rise of ground for protection alone, we spent a dismal night. The morning of the 15th broke at last, clear and cold, but none too soon for the little comfort we were able to obtain by moving about in the light of day. While breakfasting on hardtack and coffee, the fierce fighting on our right indicated that the contending forces were again engaged. As the hours advanced the firing increased and the booming of artillery presaged a general engagement in that quarter. was subsequently learned that General Pillow had sallied from his works attacking McClernand's division. After continuing the fight for some hours, pressed by superior numbers the Union forces fell back. General Lew Wallace, however, sent a portion of his division from the right center to aid; the enemy was driven back, and by noon the positions of the morning had been regained by General McClernand's forces.

This was the situation on the right and center, about noon, or a little later, of the 15th. We on the left only knew of the battle on our right from the rattle of musketry and booming of artillery. What the losses or who the victors we could only conjecture from the incomplete stories of the wounded who came within our camp, and the passing stragglers, whose tales, as usual, were dire rumors of repulse, defeat and disaster. Still no orders came to us except to keep near the camp, and we gathered closer to our lines of stacked guns.

We had, as a regiment, been in service nearly nine months. We were well drilled, fortunately for what was to follow, but had never been under fire. We had drilled and marched, dug rifle-pits and thrown up entrenchments, had confidence in our officers, as well as a strong reliance upon our organization; but as the time passed and noon came and the engagement on the right seemed to lull, we began to fear—and this was an expression heard from many—that the battle would be over and won—for we seemed to have no misgiving for the ultimate outcome—before we had a chance to participate in it, as we desired in the ardor of our young military career.

But we got into it that afternoon, and on the morning of the 16th the Second Iowa stood at the head of the army inside the works.

About two o'clock, or a little later, that Saturday afternoon, while under arms but standing at ease in line alert, to every move, eagerly expectant that we would at last be ordered into the battle, the sounds of which on our right had ominously

eeased, we observed General Smith with several of his staff ride up to our Colonel, and as we took our guns, dressed our lines and saluted the division commander, he made a brief address—more an order than a speech; it impressed us intensely; saying he had selected our regiment to lead a charge upon the enemy's works; he told us to rely upon the bayonet and not to fire a shot until the enemy's works were reached and his lines broken.

General Charles F. Smith, a graduate of West Point in 1825, had then seen thirty-seven years continuous service in the army; he was a fine looking man and a brilliant officer. If we had had any lingering doubts of possible defeat in the assault that was to come they were dispelled by his action and manner as he emphasized his former command, "Second Iowa, you must take the fort, take the caps off your guns, fix bayonets, and I will lead you!" He electrified us by his words and example, and we were ready to follow him over the entrenchments or wherever he might lead. As he rode his horse attended by several of his staff he was a most soldierly figure—a leader who inspired us with the greatest admiration.

We stood in line some little time while the disposition of other troops and supporting columns was arranged for the assault, and during those moments (expressing my own feelings) I think we were animated, perhaps with every emotion of the human mind or heart—except that of fear. But, standing there in the near presence of certain death to many, who could attempt to portray the sentiments which animated the hearts of the officers and men of the regiment? Who will fall? Will I? Of the 630 officers and men who answered for duty at roll-call that morning, how many and who will answer, "here!" when the roll is called to-morrow morning? Little was said. We stood silently in thought, awaiting the order to advance.

As I stood in the ranks near the center of Company C, I glanced to the right and saw brave, handsome "Jack" Slaymaker, our Captain, standing with bowed head. A few moments later leading the company up the hill he gave his last command on earth.

A little after three o'clock, General Smith again rode up and the command "forward!" came at last. Marching left in front until the left wing and colors of the regiment cleared a narrow strip of woods which hid us from the enemy's works, the command, "by the right flank," brought us squarely fronting and in open view of the Confederate earthworks on the brow of the hill, and now 200 yards away the enemy's first volleys of fire pass over our heads. We press forward. They get the range and the shots begin to tell. Between us and their fire lav fallen trees and brush, and as we approach the earthworks, a wide strip of abattis from timber felled to clear their immediate front greatly impeded our progress. The works, too, were crested with logs from under which the enemy poured their fire. One writer, in describing the charge said, "It appeared incredible that troops could go up that hill and keep any kind of lines of organization. It looked as if a rabbit could scarcely get through the brush and logs, and fallen timber, but, broken as the lines often were by such obstructions, and the storm of lead poured from the enemy, the regiment faltered not, but what was left of it pressed on and over the earthworks."

To let the record speak, I quote also from the official report of Gen. Charles F. Smith, as to the charge made by the regiment and its success. "The Second Iowa was ordered to rely on the bayonet and not to fire a shot until the enemy's ranks were broken. Right gallantly was the duty performed. The left wing of the regiment, under Col. Tuttle, moved steadily

over the open space down the ravine and up the rough ground covered with large timber, in unbroken line, regardless of the fire poured into it, and paused not until the enemy broke and fled. It was quickly followed by the right wing under Lieut. Col. Baker, in the same manner. The movement of this regiment was a very handsome exhibition of soldierly conduct."

General W. F. Smith ("Baldy"), writing of this report, says, "Words of praise came but seldom from Gen. Smith's lips, and those that he bestows on the Second Iowa are beyond all price."

In his full report of the battle, Gen. Grant says: "I ordered a charge upon the left with the division under Gen. Charles F. Smith, which was most brilliantly executed and gave to our arms full assurance of victory."

Note the engineering faculty embodied in the words of General (then Lieut. Col.) James B. McPherson, Gen. Grant's Chief Engineer:

"The news that Gen. Smith had captured the rebel entrenchments on their right, was borne along the lines, cheering and stimulating the men. We had secured a key to the enemy's position, obtaining a point having about as great an elevation as any portion of his works and where we could plant our artillery."

Colonel J. D. Webster, Chief of Staff, said: "On the left a successful assault gave us the possession of a position within the enemy's lines and opened the way for a still better one, \* \* \* and induced the enemy to capitulate on the morning of the 16th."

In forming for the charge the colors were ordered to go with the left wing, and retained such position. The story of the color guard is interesting, attended as it was with casualties. Color Sergeant Doolittle fell early in the charge pierced by four balls. Corporal Page took the flag but soon fell dead. Corporal Churcher took them next and fell with a wound which cost his arm. Corporal Weaver next fell mortally wounded, and Corporal Robinson was next to fall, shot in the face. Corporal Twombly seized the flag, was knocked down by a spent ball, but, recovering, carried the flag to the end of the fight, the only man of the color guard on his feet at the close.

In the charge the regiment was ably supported by the Seventh and Fourteenth Iowa, the Twenty-fifth and Fifty-second Indiana (the latter temporarily attached to the Fourth Brigade under Colonel Lauman). Their losses aggregated 22 killed and 137 wounded. The entire loss of the brigade (including 4 killed and 48 wounded of the Fifty-second Indiana), aggregated 73 killed and 339 wounded, a total of 412. Of this number, the Second Iowa lost 208, over half.

Fox, in his statistical work citing losses in the Civil War, gives the losses of the Second Iowa as 54 killed and died of wounds, and 154 wounded in this engagement, a total of 208.

My company, "C," with the left wing, lost 29 killed and wounded. Just as I saw my Captain fall I sank down, and for the first time realized that the balls were flying pretty thick. I heard one or two strike the log I fell on, and only remember crawling down on the lower side of it, when all consciousness passed from me. When I recovered. I found myself a half mile in the rear, the surgeon cutting a ball out of my right hip. The next morning with other wounded I was placed on a boat and sent down the river.

Early on Sunday morning following our assault, those of us in the hospital camps heard great and continuous cheering. Starting on the left the sound gained in volume as it ran along the lines to the right. We soon learned the cause of this unusual noise from a battle-field at early morn. Fort Donelson had surrendered! The victory was ours and was complete. The capitulation delivered into our hands, as shown by official reports, 14.623 prisoners of war, 65 cannon, 17,000 muskets, that is to say an entire army with all its equipments. Also a large quantity of army stores. Gen. Grant, in his report enumerating the captured stores stated that he thought there was rice enough to last to the end of the war!

The victory was of the greatest moment and importance to the Union cause, and it was generally celebrated all over the north. As stated in a public report, "The moral effect was immense. Bull Run was blotted out by a victory much more hotly contested. It was a terrible blow to the South."

It caused the hasty evacuation of Bowling Green, Kentucky, and Nashville, Tennessee, by the Confederate forces, and the next stand taken by them was at Shiloh.

The effect of the victory upon the young soldiery and newly recruited organizations immediately engaged, as well as volunteer troops elsewhere, was valuable in that it gave them confidence in themselves and their officers. It was about the first engagement of the war in which attacking troops assaulted the enemy in his own intrenchments. Here fought McClernand, W. H. L. Wallace, Ransom, Oglesby, Gen. Lew. Wallace, names then new and unknown to fame or warfare, afterward familiar and renowned in war and peace. The fame of Logan, who won military glory at Donelson, which led to future advancement in the army and eminence in the political field, has only recently been freshened by the dedication to him in this city of one of the finest of its many monuments.

Here, too, Grant added to laurels won at Belmont and Fort Henry, and his signal achievement in winning the "unconditional surrender of Donelson" had greatly to do with the advancement of his career until he became Commander-in-Chief of the Army and the victorious general of the Civil War.

In his report General Grant accorded full credit to Gen.

Charles F. Smith for the brilliant work of the division under his command. Time does not allow for more than a brief reflection on the career of this officer. It is conceded by military students that had he lived Gen. Charles F. Smith would have ranked among the most eminent leaders of the war. His early demise after Donelson was a distinct loss to the Union Army.

General W. T. Sherman is on record as saying that "General Smith's reputation as a soldier was simply perfect."

He died at Savannah, Tennessee, April 25, 1862.

In closing, I may be pardoned for again referring to the Second Iowa Infantry.

Major General Halleck, commanding the department, telegraphed the Adjutant General of Iowa:

"The Second Iowa proved themselves the braves of the brave; they had the honor of leading the column which entered Fort Donelson."

When the Union Army marched in to take possession, the regiment was awarded the post of honor, and with music and banners marched at the head of the column.

My personal connection with the regiment ended with this battle. Discharged in July following because of my wound, I subsequently served in the Seventy-third Indiana Volunteers as a lieutenant, which service accords me the favor of addressing you this evening.

The Second Iowa Infantry won many new honors during the war. It is included in the 300 regiments recorded as having sustained the highest losses in killed and wounded in battle in the Civil War. The story of its charge has been told by abler pens than mine, but I am proud of my service in it as one of the "men behind the guns" at the taking of Donelson.

Washington, D. C., April 2, 1902.



0 013 701 822 6